

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

MISSOURI REENTRY PROCESS AND WOMEN'S PROGRAMS

Fact Sheet

Preparing offenders to be productive citizens is the focus of the Missouri Reentry Process. The stakes are enormous, considering that one in every three Missouri prison admissions in 2003 was a returning parole violator. Or that 97% of all current inmates in Missouri will eventually be released back to a community. During FY 2004, the Missouri Department of Corrections released over 18,000 offenders back to communities across Missouri. The public safety implication of these thousands of offenders leaving prison affects every citizen in Missouri.

Released offenders have a significant impact on not only their own families but communities as a whole. While the challenge of inmates leaving prison and settling into communities has traditionally been viewed solely as a Department of Corrections issues, the truth is that multiple state and local agencies not associated with an offenders' arrest, prosecution or incarceration will be called upon to provide services to these individuals. For example, over 42% of all Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse clientele were criminal justice referrals. 30.4% of prison releases in FY 2002 received services from the Missouri Department of Mental Health during the first 12 months of release. During the same time, 25.9% of new probationers received services from the Department of Mental Health during the first 12 months of probation.

The Department of Mental Health is just one of the six agencies who are working together to improve offender reentry outcomes in the Missouri Reentry Process (MRP). Along with the Departments of Corrections, Economic Development, Health and Senior Services, Social Services and Office of State Courts Administrator, the MRP is a process of collaboration to get something done together that can't be done alone. Successful offender reentry does not occur in a corrections vacuum, with so many offenders needing the services of many other agencies to be successful.

Missouri is using a Transition from Prison to Community Initiative (TPCI) developed by Abt Associates and the National Institute of Corrections, adapted to meet Missouri's needs, in addressing the reentry challenge. TPCI is not a "soft-on-crime" approach, but an approach that holds offenders accountable. It provides a powerful springboard for intra-departmental and inter-departmental collaboration to improve reentry practices. The goals of Missouri's Reentry Process are consistent with the Governor's priority results for Missourians, including:

- Increased percentage of Missourians with high school diploma or GED
- Children not abused or neglected
- Students without substance abuse
- Decreased rate of unemployment
- Decreased rate of crime
- Fewer repeat offenders
- Less juvenile crime
- People with mental illness moving toward recovery

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL PLANNING PROCESS

On August 21, 2002, the six agencies joined with community-based groups into an inter-departmental collaboration designed to improve reentry practices with the ultimate goal of improving public safety in communities. An Inter-Departmental Workshop was conducted on September 9 and 10, 2002, where the following theme issues emerged that were considered critical to reentry:

- Focus on common goals
- Continuity of care
- Common assessment tools
- Establish an inter-departmental planning process
- Sharing information between stakeholder agencies
- Coordinated case management
- Common outcome measures

The MRP Steering Team was established and began work on September 17, 2002, with the task of manning MRP planning efforts for the collaborating organizations and to develop strategies to improve transition practices. The MRP Steering Team was provided with essential process support, which was critical to the planning process. The steering team's charter and a roadmap was established, with the team held accountable to Department of Corrections Director Gary Kempker and the Directors of each collaborating agency.

The Planning Roadmap included having each Steering Team member possess a clear understanding of current Missouri practices and Missouri goals; an examination of Missouri baseline data concerning offender reentry; formulating focus groups on the various issues; identifying risk and protective factors in Missouri; reviewing literature concerning "what works;" identifying strategies to improve reentry and achieve goals and finally, implementing changes.

BASELINE DATA

The Steering Committee spent a considerable amount of time analyzing baseline data about offender reentry, specifically the top factors that correlate with prison returns. The following factors are highly correlated with success or failure for offenders returning to prison in Missouri:

- Employment
- Work
- Family Issues
- Vocational Training
- Substance Abuse
- Education

Employment: Only 14 percent of offenders who secured full-time employment upon release returned to prison. The return rate is significantly higher for those who did not find full-time employment, with 33.3 percent of those working part-time returning to prison and 54.3 percent of those unemployed returning to prison. In addition, offenders who completed the Employability and Life Skills program showed a much lower return rate in the first year, with 8 percent of those who completed ES/LS returning to prison in that time, 29 percent who had no ES/LS and 44 percent of those who failed ES/LS.

Vocational training: Offenders who raised their vocational skill level while in prison training show a much lower return to prison rate (19%) than those with no vocational skills (45%), after two years from release.

Substance abuse: Of 8,468 offenders with substance abuse problems released during the five-year period from FY 1998-2002, 28.3 percent of those without treatment recidivated in 1 year and returned to prison and only 4.7 percent of those with both institutional treatment and aftercare returned to prison in 1 year. Also, of all those who return to prison for a new conviction, 31 percent are returned for a new drug conviction and 16 percent are returned for a new DWI conviction (47% total).

Mental Health: The re-incarceration rate is higher for offenders with mental health problems. Those offenders with a MH4 score returned to prison at a rate just under 80 percent over a 5-year period, while those offenders with a MH3 score return to prison at a rate just over 50 percent over that same five-year time span. Major Mental Health issues as cited by Probation and Parole Officers included access to medications, need for additional psychological assessment, need for training in recognition of signs and access to treatment.

Family Issues: Offender focus groups indicated that family members provided the most help to them upon returning to the community. Offenders also reported to having 112,246 dependent children with at least one parent under some form of DOC supervision, including 35,468 dependent children with a parent in prison, 60,400 dependent children with a parent under probation supervision and 16,378 dependent children with a parent under parole supervision. Additionally, 10 percent of the 18,000 children participating in Head Start programs in Missouri have a parent in prison.

Two of the most significant focus group findings of the committee had to do with information sharing, including a need for enhanced information sharing between institutional officers and community officers and a need for the same between social service agencies and line officers in the institution and community.

WHAT'S CHANGING?

Given the accumulated data, the next question for the committee and ultimately for each affected department was what changes would be made to address the challenge of offender reentry? The following strategies have been enacted in each respective area:

Getting A Job: The Department established a linkage with the Division of Workforce Development for service to offenders prior to release. This includes informational meetings in prison during the Transition Phase, eligibility screening before release, Great Hires job matching and linkage with local Workforce Investment Boards. Another strategy involves providing Employability Skills/Life Skills classes to all offenders before release.

Improving Mental Health Care: Standards of care were established for mental health professionals working with released offenders, including substance abuse and mental illness. Also, formal Mental Health discharge planning was established with direct linkage to community providers.

Strengthening Family Support: Department of Social Services staff are to be designated to address offender needs prior to release, including child support, parent mediation, family services, etc. Another strategy was to have the University Extension Center provide the Building Strong Families program to offenders during the transition phase.

Establish Transitional Housing Units: A Transition Housing Unit (THU) is a housing unit or wing for offenders who are within 180 days of release. The THU allows for focused preparation on reentry to the community, with everyone including offenders and staff gearing toward the offender's transition home. Offenders in the THU work on goals outlined in the Transitional Accountability Plan (TAP). Assignment to THU is part of business practice and not optional for the offender. While an offender is housed in the THU, there is linkage established with community resources. Programming while an offender is housed in the THU includes Employability Skills/Life Skills (ES/LS); Division of Workforce Development informational meetings and eligibility screening; registration in the "Great Hires" system; cognitive skills; parenting skills; substance abuse education; Department of Social Services information linkage and spiritual/faith awareness.

Create A Web-Based Resource Guide: A web-based guide that allows staff and offenders to identify and link with services, organizations and other resources in their communities.

Improving Cognitive Skills: The committee has worked to identify and implement programs for enhancing offender motivation and cognitive skills both in the institutions and the field.

Substance Abuse Treatment: Offer individualized, community-based treatment programming that helps offenders succeed in employment and substance abuse treatment without one interfering with the other. Institutional substance abuse treatment standards are being reviewed to emphasize reentry preparation and links with community providers. Schedule appointments for community aftercare prior to an offender's release.

Responding To Violations In The Community: The violation process should provide fair, balanced, and consistent responses to all violations in a timely manner. The violation response should reflect an assessment of offender need and community risk noting strengths and weaknesses.

Transition Accountability Plan (TAP): Establish a Transition Accountability Plan (TAP) and pre-release planning process that begins early, creates an offender-specific case management team, assigns responsibility, includes family and significant others, identifies assets and liabilities and gets information to the right people at the right time.

PARTNERSHIPS

Perhaps the most appealing feature of the Missouri Reentry Process is the cooperation and partnership between six government agencies in addressing the challenge of offenders returning to communities.

Reentry Partners: What TO DO:

- Have the full support from the state agency director and clear delegation of his or her authority.
- Keep other Department heads informed and invested.
- Be data given
- Accept only senior decision-makers from partner agencies on the steering team.
- Have a steering team that is a "boundary spanner," has rank, common sense, personality, patience, persistence, thick skin, an open mind and a sense of humor.
- Use a professional facilitator.

Reentry Partners: What NOT TO DO:

- Tolerate mediocrity, indifference, inconsistent participation or nonprofessional conflict among steering team members; replace them if necessary.
- Rely exclusively or even primarily on national data.
- Underestimate resistance.
- Overestimate resistance.
- Wait for the “right time” to get started.
- Take on World Hunger.
- Promise what you cannot deliver.

The Missouri Department of Corrections and its partnering agencies are committed to building a collaboration-based offender reentry system that will make a difference in communities across the state.

If you have any questions, please contact Randee Kaiser, Director, Division of Offender Rehabilitative Services at 573-526-6493.

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"After all is said and done there is no such thing as managing change. You lead change or you follow it."

By Peter Drucker